

Millerton Lake State Recreation Area



Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

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Governor

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Secretary for Resources

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Director, California State Parks



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Millerton Lake State Recreation Area is located in the heart of California, near the southernmost end of the Mother Lode gold region. Here, where the San Joaquin River flows out of the Sierra Nevada foothills and into the Central Valley, 319-foot Friant Dam was built across the river canyon in 1944. Thus was formed one of the most popular recreation areas in the San Joaquin Valley, whose 47 miles of shoreline are a magnet for families seeking high-quality recreational opportunities.

PARK HISTORY

For thousands of years, several groups of Northern Foothill Yokuts lived in the rolling grasslands and woodlands of the region. The women crafted beautiful baskets used for both utilitarian and ceremonial purposes. The men harvested acorns and hunted deer, quail and other game. They were especially skilled at fishing for



Millerton Courthouse in the spring

salmon, which they then preserved by a drying process and stored for winter use. The lives of the Yokuts were altered by the intrusion of settlers who brought diseases to which they had no immunity, depleted their food sources, and caused them to be displaced from their villages. Conflicts with the new arrivals led ultimately to the Mariposa Indian War, which ended in 1851 with the signing of a peace treaty at the U.S. military encampment known as Camp Barbours. An envoy had negotiated treaties with several California Indian groups, but Congress failed to ratify the treaties. Camp Barbours, now beneath the lake's surface, was built in 1850. A tent city called Rootville, later changed to Millerton, sprang up and quickly prospered. It served as the Fresno County seat from 1856 to 1874. The area's only courthouse was built in 1867. In 1941 it was dismantled and reconstructed on its present site at Mariner's Point to protect it from rising floodwaters. The Courthouse has been restored to look much as it did more than a century ago. Today the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation maintains Friant Dam as part of the federal Central Valley

Project to manage water for flood control, drinking water and irrigation. California State Parks has an operating agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation for the management of Millerton Lake.

WILDLIFE

Millerton Lake has the largest population of wintering bald eagles in the San Joaquin Valley, most having migrated more than 1600 miles from summer breeding grounds in Canada. The San Joaquin drainage and other nearby lakes have several nesting bald eagle pairs, and they are occasionally spotted in summer.

Other wildlife watching opportunities include resident golden eagles, waterfowl, and both indigenous and migratory bird species that travel to and from the higher portions of the Sierra Nevada. Larger mammals such as deer, bobcats, coyotes and mountain lions inhabit the area. Smaller animals include foxes, badgers, skunks, raccoons, opossums, cottontail rabbits and ground squirrels.

PLANT COMMUNITIES

The first fall rains turn the hills green and wildflowers reach their peak in April. During the summer occasional stately blue oak or





View from the south shore

live oak trees dot the dry brown hills. Up the river canyon, oaks and gray pine combine with manzanita, ceonothus and other chaparral to form a denser forest.

Above the upper river canyon, vernal pools provide a vital habitat for the short life cycles of frogs, toads, tiny fairy shrimp,



prehistoric-looking tadpole shrimp, and specially adapted plants. Vernal pool tours are available by special arrangement.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Summer temperatures can reach 100 degrees, so hikers should always carry drinking water. October brings a pleasant 50 to 80 degrees. In the spring, when sailing regattas and water skiers start to fill the lake, temperatures range from 40 to 65 degrees.

Picnicking—Picnic areas with barbecue grills and restrooms surround the lake. Groups of up to 100 may reserve Grange Grove picnic area. South Finegold—reachable by car and boat—has tables, wood stoves and a shade ramada that can accommodate 150.

Boating—Millerton's shoreline has three launch ramps with parking nearby. Snacks, beverages, bait and boat rentals are available at Winchell Cove Marina. Local boating groups stage sailboat races and regattas in June and July, and a local water ski club maintains a slalom course for public use.

Hiking and Bicycling—Trails range from level hiking areas to challenging mountain bike trails. Markers along a 1/4-mile interpretive trail at Fort Miller campground explain the natural and cultural resources. The strenuous, hiking-only Buzzard's Roost Trail at the north shore offers lake views. On the south shore, Blue Oak Trail provides a level, two-mile hike to

Winchell Cove. An 11-mile trail follows the river canyon from South Finegold to the Bureau of Land Management's rustic Squaw Leap campground.

Fishing—The shoreline habitat provides hiding places for an abundance of bass and fishing tournaments are occasionally scheduled. A fishing license is required.

Camping—The north shore has 148 developed sites among oak and gray pine woodlands, 27 with electricity hookups. Each site has a table, stove and drinking water. Two group campgrounds can accommodate from 40 to 75 people.



Lake view campsite

Boat Camping—Temperance Flat has 25 first-come, first-served sites reachable by boat. North Finegold can hold 15 fully-contained boats. Register in advance at the south shore park entrance during park hours. Read the boat camping information

sheet for details on shore campsites, registration, marinas, safety requirements, and self-contained sanitation devices. It is recommended that boaters complete a boating safety course before operating their boats at Millerton.



Boating activities

INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS

- Summer campfire programs
- School group tours of the Courthouse, Friant Dam, and the fish hatchery
- Group boat tours to view the bald and golden eagles around the lake from December to February. Call in November for reservations.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES &

- Ten family campsites, restrooms and picnic sites.
- Level group sites; four picnic tables, restrooms. Terrain around campsites is variable—call for details.

Accessible conditions are constantly improving. Call the park for the latest information.

DAM AND LAKE FACTS

Type of structure: concrete gravity

Dam height: 319 feet

Lake width: from one to three miles

Reservoir surface elevation:

471 feet to 578 feet above sea level

Reservoir total capacity at 578 feet:

520,500 acre-feet (642,036,750 cubic meters)

Water surface: 4,900 acres when lake is full

Main purposes: reclamation, flood control, irrigation, recreation

Outlets: Friant-Kern Canal, Madera Canal, San Joaquin River

Maintained by: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation



View of Big Bend area and backcountry

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Look out for rattlesnakes, mountain lions and poison oak.
- Lifeguards are on duty only during summer. Park staff recommend that children wear approved life jackets.
- Alcohol is prohibited on the beaches. Operating a boat under the influence of alcohol or drugs is against the law.